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THE OLD INDIAN TRADERS OF INDIANA

BY CHARLES B. LASSELLE

[This account of the early traders of Indiana was written nearly fifty years ago by Charles B. Lassel, of Logansport, now eighty-five years old. He is of a French family of traders that has been identified with the Wabash valley for more than one hundred and twenty-five years, and has himself been a life-long student of the earlier history of the valley and a collector of documents bearing upon the same; hence he speaks as an authority upon this all-but-forgotten early trade.—*Editor.*]

OF the early pioneers of our State, there is no class whose history, if known, would be more interesting than that of the old Indian traders. Far in advance of the progress, changes and improvements of civilization, they beheld our country in all the wildness, grandeur and solitude in which the God of nature placed it; and they commingled freely and familiarly with the aboriginal owners who have forever disappeared from its face. In point of time, they were among the first, if not themselves the first, of the explorers of the country, and are known to have visited and traded with the Indians within our borders about a century previous to our Revolutionary War. They have always occupied a prominent position in the early historical events of the country, as a controlling medium in the relations between the whites and Indians. But although—whether French, English or Americans—they have generally been men of education and general intelligence, yet such have been the peculiar nature and vicissitudes of their calling, that they have left us very few records of their experience.

The earliest traders were French, and came mostly from Montreal, in Canada. From this place they transported their merchandise up the St. Lawrence and across the shores of the Lakes, to their posts in the West, by means of the simple canoe. At first, and before the introduction of horses, the difficulties of passing Niagara Falls and the portage between the head waters

of the streams running into the Lakes and the Mississippi were surmounted by carrying the canoes and merchandise by means of the men employed in the voyage. The Normandy horse, whose descendents have long been known as the Canadian and Indian ponies, having been introduced into Canada, was afterwards, and probably about 1720, brought to the West, and made to serve as pack-horses for all land transportation. And such were the principal modes of transportation in the West, at least in Indiana, from about 1680 to about 1812. The Canadian cart, samples of which are yet to be seen about the old French settlements, had indeed been used about the villages in the early day; but there being no roads of any length, other than the narrow Indian trail, they could not be used for distant transportation.

We can scarcely realize, at this day, the extent to which the Indian trade was carried on, both in the amount of goods sold, and the furs and the peltries received in exchange. When the country was first visited by the traders, the animals affording these commodities were found in great abundance. The Buffalo ranged in large numbers over the prairies of Illinois and those of our own State bordering on the Wabash, as well as in the forests in the vicinity of the salt springs. The Beaver, the remains of whose dams are yet to be found in many parts of the State, especially in the northern portion, was to be found in many of the northern streams. The Bear, Elk, Deer, Panther, Otter, Wolf, Wildcat, Fox and Raccoon, were also to be found in considerable numbers in various portions of the State. The Indians not having any weapons with which to take these animals but the simple stone-headed arrow, nor any clothing but the rude elk or deer skin, the introduction of the gun and merchandise by the traders, soon afforded both parties a rich harvest. And although the amount of furs produced was afterwards very much diminished by the destruction of game, yet it still continued large for a long time; and the trade yet yielded the traders large gains so late as about the year 1838, when the principal body of the Pottawattamie tribe of Indians emigrated west of the Mississippi.

It is perhaps impossible to state, at this distance of time, who was the first trader within the limits of our State, or when or where he traded. It is quite probable, however, that the northern

portion was traversed by some of their clerks, called "*couriers des bois*" (woods rangers,) between the years 1660-70; and it is certain that some of La Salle's men traded in the vicinity of the St. Joseph of Lake Michigan, in the year 1680. But the first of whom we have any definite account was the Sieur Juchereau, Lieutenant General of Montreal, who, we are told, established a trading post "on the Wabash," in the name of a company, for the collection of buffalo skins. There has indeed been some doubt as to the locality of this spot; but, coinciding with Judge Law in his address to the Vincennes Historical Society, 1839, for the reasons therein given, together with others, and especially the coincidence of its date of settlement with that of Vincennes, as given by its ancient inhabitants,* the writer deems it conclusive that the town of Vincennes is the site of this trading post.

The Sieur Juchereau arrived at this spot, at the head of thirty-four Canadians, on the 28th of October, 1702, for the purpose, as mentioned, of trafficking for buffalo skins, and such was his success in the trade that in a little over two years afterwards there were collected at the post, at one time, upwards of thirteen thousand of those skins.† How many had been collected in the meantime and shipped off, is unknown. The establishment, however, soon met with disasters. Juchereau died; and, although he was succeeded by another, a Mr. Lambert, yet the hostilities of the Indians forced them to abandon it as a trading post, and Lambert with forty men descended to Mobile—then the headquarters of Louisiana—in the winter of 1705. The above mentioned number of skins having been left at that post, they were neglected by the agents of that company, and were eventually lost.‡

For a long while after Juchereau's settlement at Vincennes, we have no particular account of any other; although there must have been traders soon afterwards—at least by 1721—at the village of St. Joseph,§ Ke-ki-ong-a, We-ah-ta-non and Vincennes; as the three former places were well known to

*Dillon's Historical Notes, p. 100.

†Certainly a very interesting statement, in view of our meager knowledge of the buffalo in Indiana.—*Editor*.

‡La Harpe's Historical Journal, pp. 75, 88-89.

§Near the present town of South Bend.

the early French writers,* and the latter had also become a military post in 1716.†

Of those who traded at the above named and other points, from Juchereau's time until the date of Governor Harrison's list of 1801-2, the following only are known to the writer:—

At VINCENNES, Antoine Drouet de Richardville traded previous to the year 1764; but how long before is unknown. He had also traded, many years before, at Kaskaskia; and a promissory note, in the possession of the writer, which was given to him in the manner of those times, might be produced here as an ancient writing, and as the earliest specimen of the *commercial paper* of the West, known, it is believed, to the public. It reads thus:

“I, the undersigned, under my ordinary mark, owe to Sir de Drouet Richardville the sum of thirteen livres in beaver or other peltries, which I promise to pay in the course of the year seventeen hundred and thirty-nine. At Kaskaskia, April 21, 1738.

Witness:

M. P. Beaubien.”

his

DELA ✕ VIGOIER.

mark.

John Bt. Bosseron traded at the same place (Vincennes) about 1760 to 1780; Francis Bosseron and Ambrose Dagenet from about 1775 to about 1790, and John M. P. Legralle, Adhemer St. Martin and Lawrence Bazadone, at times embraced in the latter periods. Two of these traders, Major Francis Bosseron and Col. J. M. P. Legralle (usually spelled Legras), also took a prominent part in the Revolutionary scenes about Vincennes in 1778-9, and rendered very valuable services in the American cause. There was a Piankashaw village adjoining this place, but the trade also extended to other tribes.

At KE-KI-ONG-A,‡ Joseph Drouet de Richardville, the father of the late Chief of the tribe, traded from about 1750 to about 1770; Peter F. La Fontain traded from about 1775 to 1795; John Beaubien traded during the same period; James Lasselle traded from 1776 to 1780. This individual having been an officer in the Canadian militia, was appointed to the superintendency of this “post” as an agent of Indian affairs, and re-

*Charlevoix, p. 189.

†La Harpe, p. 123.

‡Where Ft. Wayne stands

sided here with his family; but he was forced to abandon it precipitately on La Balme's expedition in the fall of 1780. David Gray, as one of a company, also traded here about the year 1786.

At WE-AH-TA-NON, Francis, Peter and Nicholas Berthelet, three brothers, traded from about 1776 to 1780. A Mr. Pielt also traded here at an early period, but the precise time is unknown. This place is said to have been a very early trading point, and Captain Croghan, who visited it in 1765, says of it in his journal, that "the great plenty of furs taken in this country, induced the French to establish this post, which was the first on the Wabash; and by a very advantageous trade, they have been richly recompensed for their labor."

At KE-NA-PE-KA-ME-KONG-A, or Eel River town, an old Miami village on Eel River, about six miles above the present town of Logansport, there were also traders at an early period. But the only one now known was James Godfrey (father of the late War Chief of the tribe), who traded from about 1775 to 1791, when the village was destroyed by General Wilkinson.

Besides those above mentioned there were many other traders at these and other places, and at other periods of time; but perhaps the above meager list is all that can now be furnished of the individuals.

TRADERS LICENSED BY GOVERNOR HARRISON.

I have in my possession a list of Indian traders that were licensed by Governor Harrison in 1801-2. The original document is in the handwriting of John Rice Jones, who acted as amanuensis for John Gibson, then Secretary of the Territory.

Nearly all in this list had traded with the Indians previous to this date and continued to do so afterwards. They are as follows, as given in the original:

Licenses granted by the Governor to Indian traders:

1801—November —. One to — Todd to trade with the Delawares on Blue River, where the road to Louisville crosses that river, (Note 1).

20th. One to Ambrose Dagenet to trade with the Miami nation at their town of Terrehaute, (2).

26th. One to — L'Espagnol to trade with the Delaware nation at their town of Packangahelis, (3).

27th. One to Henry Mayrans to trade with the Miami nation at their town of Terrehaute.

27th. One to — Le Claire to trade with the Kickapoo nation of Indians at their town, (4).

27th. One to Francis Bonins to trade with the Potawatimie nation at their town of Quinquiqui, (5).

27th. One to Thos. Lusby to trade with the Kikapoes at their town.

27th. One to Jno. Bt. Petrimiean to trade with the Delaware nation at their town of Mississippi, (6).

27th. One to Francis Lafantazie to trade with the Potawatimie nation at their town of Chipaille, (7).

28th. One to William Morrison to trade with the Indians in the neighborhood of Kaskaskia, (8).

30th. One to Etienne Bisayon to trade with the Delaware nation at their town of Telipockshy, (9).

30th. One to Antoine Lasselle to trade with the Delaware nation at their town of Nantico, (10).

30th. One to Antoine Lasselle to trade with the Delaware nation at their town of Grand Marias, (10).

30th. One to Louis Boure to trade with the Potawatimie nation at their town of Coeur de Serf, (11).

30th. One to Hyacinth Lasselle to trade with the Miami nation at their town of Massissinou, (12).

30th. One to Baptiste Boismier to trade with the Delaware nation at their town of Chatagnier, (13).

30th. One to Benoit Besayon to trade with the Potawatimie nation at their town of Eel Creek, (14).

30th. One to John and William Conner to trade with the Delaware nation at their town of Petchepencues, (15).

30th. One to John and William Conner to trade with the Delaware nation at their town of Buckengelaus, (15).

December 4th. One to Baptiste Bino to trade with the Potawatimie nation at their town of Tippiconou, (16).

4th. One to Baptiste Toupin to trade with the Kikapoe nation at their town.

4th. One to Francis Meilleur to trade with the Kikapoe nation at their town of Vermillion.

5th. One to Charles Johnson to trade with the Miami nation at their town of Terrehaute.

8th. One to Peter Thorn to trade with the Delaware nation at their town on the Ohio river, opposite the town of Henderson, in the State of Kentucky.

12th. One to Frederick Fisher to trade with the Delaware nation at their town of Buckengelis.

12th. One to Frederick Fisher to trade with the Shawnee nation at their Old Town, (17).

12th. One to Samuel Harrison to trade with the Cherokee nation at their town of Massac, (18).

12th. One to Michael Brouillet to trade with the Miami nation at their town of Renaud, (19).

12th. One to Louis Severs to trade with the Miami nation at their town of Little Wabash, (20).

12th. One with Jos. Dumay to trade with the Delaware nation at their town of White River Ferry.

15th. One to Germain Charbonneau to trade with the Miami nation at their town of Chipaille.

15th. One to Jannet Pillet to trade with the Delaware nation at their town of White River.

1802—January 7th. One to Joseph Numonville to trade with the Ottawa nation at their town of Machekigon, (21).

7th. One to Joseph Bailey, to trade with the Ottawa nation at their town on the Grand River, (22).

7th. One to Joseph Pirigaure, to trade with the Potawatimie nation at their town of Kiakiki, (23).

7th. One to Joseph Machard, to trade with the Potawatimie nation at their town of Kiakiki, (24).

7th. One to Joseph Ricard, to trade with the Ottawa nation at their town of Grand River, (24).

7th. One to Etienne Lamorandiere to trade with the Potawatimie nation at their town Kickalimazo, (24).

7th. One to Peter Prejan, to trade with the Potawatimie and Ottawa nations at their town on the River St. Joseph, (25).

7th. One to John Griffin to trade with the Potawatimie nation at their town of Kiakiki, (25).

The above list comprises the most of those who traded within the present limits of the State, for some years previous to its territorial date and until the commencement of hostilities in 1811; although there were some others afterwards licensed by Governor

Harrison and by the Superintendent of Indian Affairs at Detroit. The war of course put a stop to the trade during its continuance; but on its close in 1815, it was resumed—generally by new traders—to a much less extent. The old traders, as before remarked, having with great unanimity taken up arms for the protection of the frontiers against the Indians, the survivors had too much lost the confidence of the Indians to make it pleasant or profitable to resume the business.

At Fort Harrison it was resumed in 1815, mostly with the Delawares, Pottawattamies, Shawnees and Kickapoos, and was continued at that point until about 1820. The principal traders here at that period were Pierre La Plante, Etienne Bisayon, — Wal-lace, Anthony Lafons, — Gilbert, — Rollon and Michael Brouillet. About this period the Shawnees, Kickapoos and Delawares removed from the limits of the State, except a few of the latter near the eastern boundary, leaving only the Pottawattamies and Miamis, with whom the trade was continued in the northern portion of the State—the former mostly inhabiting the country on the Tippecanoe, the Kankakee and the St. Joseph rivers; the latter that on the Wabash, Eel, the little St. Joseph and the St. Mary rivers.

John B. Richardville, the late Chief of the Miamis, traded with that tribe, at Fort Wayne, from about 1815 to 1836.

David Conner traded mostly with the same tribe, at the village on the Mississinnewa, from about 1815 to 1846.

Alexis Coquillard and John E. Swartz traded with the Miamis and Pottawattamies, on the Little St. Joseph, about forty miles from Ft. Wayne, from 1817 to 1821.

Coquillard and Francis Comparet traded—the former at South Bend with the Pottawattamies; the latter at Ft. Wayne with the Miamis—from 1821 to 1835.

John B. Duret, as agent of the American Fur Company, traded, mostly with the Pottawattamies, at a spot on the southern bank of the Wabash, a short distance above the mouth of Rock Creek, in Carroll county, from 1820 to 1823.

George Cicott traded with the Pottawattamies, at a village of that tribe on the north bank of the Wabash, nearly opposite the last named place, from 1820 to 1823, and then till 1827 on his reserve near Georgetown.

Edward McCartney traded with both tribes, on the north and south banks of the Wabash, about a mile below the present town of Logansport, from about 1820 to 1828.

Hollister and Hunt traded, mostly with the Miamis, at Ft. Wayne, from about 1820 to 1828.

John B. Godfrey and James Peltier traded at the same place, during about the same period, as the last named.

William G. and George W. Ewing, brothers, traded at the same place, from 1822 to 1828, and continued the trade afterwards—the former at Fort Wayne till 1845, and the latter at Logansport till 1838.

John D. Doure traded at Fort Wayne from 1822 to 1838.

Barnet and Hanna traded at the same place from 1824 to 1828.

Hanna and Hamilton traded at the same place from 1825 to 1830.

John B. Jutrace traded with the Pottawattamies at a spot about three miles southwardly of the present town of Plymouth, from about 1825 to about 1835.

David Burr traded, mostly with the Miamis, at the site of the present town of Wabash, from 1826 to 1839.

John McGregor, with the same tribe, at Miamisport, near the present town of Peru, from 1827 to 1834.

Jesse Vermilya, with the same tribe, at the river Aboite, in Allen county, from 1827 to 1844.

Hugh B. McKeen, with both tribes, at the present town of Logansport, from 1827 to 1828.

Antoine Gamelin and Richard Chabert, mostly with the Pottawattamies, about a mile below the same place, on the north bank of the Wabash, during about the same period.

Joseph Barron, mostly with the same tribe, a short distance below Logansport, from 1827 to 1838. This trader had commenced life among the Indians on the Wabash, mostly as a clerk for the traders at an early day, and acted as an able interpreter for the Government for a period of more than forty years. He was one of the interpreters at the celebrated council at Vincennes, in 1810, between Tecumseh and Governor Harrison, and is said to have contributed much to their reconciliation by correctly giving the language of Tecumseh, which had been misinterpreted by another. His biography alone, if fully written, would

furnish a very interesting chapter in the history of the country, as would indeed many of those already named; but a brief reference, only, can be made of them in this short sketch.

Chauncy Carter traded with both tribes at Logansport from 1828 to 1830.

Francis D. Lasselle traded with the Miamis on White River, and at Ft. Wayne, from 1828 to 1836.

Allen Hamilton and Cyrus Taber—the former at Fort Wayne, the latter at Logansport—traded with both tribes from about 1828 to 1838. This firm, and that of W. G. & G. W. Ewing, above mentioned, carried on the trade much more extensively than any other of the modern traders, and by means of its profits and dealings in lands amassed much wealth.

Charles Conway traded with the Miamis, at Miamisport, near the present site of Peru, from 1829 to 1832.

Henry Ossem and Richard Chabret traded with the Pottawattamies at Turkey-creek Prairie, in Kosciusko county, from 1830 to 1835.

William S. Edsall, with the Miamis, at Huntington, from 1834 to 1837.

Alexander Wilson with the same tribe, at Peru, from 1834 to 1845.

Daniel R. Bearss, with the same tribe, at the same place, from 1834 to 1857.

Moses Folk, with the same tribe, at the same place, from 1839 to 1857.

James T. Miller, with the same tribe, at the same place, from 1836 to 1857.

The Pottawattamies having been removed to the west of the Mississippi, in the year 1838, and the main part of the Miamis in 1845, the trade has been gradually diminishing since the former period, so that now it is confined in a limited extent to the Miamis, who inhabit their reservations in the country lying south of the Wabash, between the towns of Peru and Fort Wayne. Indeed it may be said that the *Indian trade* proper, that is, the traffic with them for furs and peltries, has ceased to exist since the part removal of the Miamis,—a tribe which, as they were the first known inhabitants of the country embraced within the limits of the State, are the latest survivors of all

their red cotemporaries, and which, by their general good character and condition, bear testimony that they have not materially degenerated by a long intercourse with their ancient friends and patrons, the old Indian Traders.

NOTES.

1. Nothing known of this trader. The locality of his trading place would be in Washington county, near the town of Fredericksburg.

2. This Terrehaute was inhabited by the Weah branch of the Miamis, and was situated near the present town of Terre Haute, which was named after it.

3. Properly Buck-ong-a-he-las, so called after the chief of the Delawares, on the head waters of White river, and probably near the present town of Muncietown. The true name of this trader is believed to be — Simon; that of L'Espagnol [Spaniard] being a nickname.

4. Nothing known of this trader. The Kickapoos had several villages on and near the Vermillion rivers in Vermillion county. This was probably the principal one, in which the Chief resided, who was called by the traders Jose Renard [Joe the Fox], the same who led the attack on Ft. Harrison in 1812.

5. Kankakee, on the river of that name; but its location unknown.

6. This place is supposed to have been on the Mississippi, in Lower Illinois, as the Delawares also inhabited that part of the country. This trader afterwards traded at Chepaille.

7. This trader continued to trade here until his death in 1806. This place, pronounced Shepoy, was on the Wabash river, in Warren county, about a mile above the present town of Independence.

8. Kaskaskia, Illinois.

9. The locality of this place is unknown. He afterwards traded at Fort Harrison in 1815–20.

10. An old trader on the Miami of the Lake. These places were in Ohio.

11. This trader afterwards (from about 1803 to 1809) traded at Ft. Wayne, and kept pack horses and a warehouse for the deposit and transportation of merchandise and peltries in transit at the portage between the Miami and the Wabash. The local-

ity of Cœur de Serf, properly Cœur de Cerf [elk's heart], was on the Elkhart river.

12. This trader (late Gen. H. L., of Logansport), was born at the village of Ke-ki-ong-a in 1777, from which, as before mentioned, his father was obliged to flee on La Balme's expedition in 1780. He returned to the Wabash in 1795, and traded at Chepaille, at the mouth of the Little Vermillion, at Mississinnewa, and at Vincennes. This trading place (Mississinnewa) was at the settlement or village of the late Chief Godfrey, a few miles above Peru.

13. This trader and his trading place are both unknown to the writer.

14. An old trader; he also traded with the Miamis in 1807. When the hostilities commenced with the Indians in 1811, nearly all the traders offered their valuable services as scouts or soldiers in the defense of the country. Mr. Besayon, having with others joined Colonel Hopkin's expedition up the Wabash in 1812, was in the detachment of about seventy mounted men which fell into the ambuscade of about 500 Indians in the ravines of the Wild Cat, called by the survivors "Spur's Defeat" (about seven miles northeastwardly from the present town of Lafayette). He was captured in the retreat by the Indians, who, well knowing him, and regarding him as a kind of traitor to them, condemned him at once to the most cruel of deaths—the faggot and stake. They bound him to a tree, piled combustible material about him, to which they set fire, and were proceeding to enact the scenes of triumph and torture usual upon such occasions; but a young warrior who yet regarded him with affection, and desiring to relieve him from so horrid a fate, hastily snatched up a rifle and shot him dead. Eel creek, on which he traded, is now the Eel river which empties into White river, but the locality of his trading place is unknown.

15. John and William Conner, brothers, were old traders, and were prominent men in their day. William, especially, rendered much service as interpreter and otherwise at several treaties with the Indians. Petchepencues was probably intended for Ponceaupichou, or, as sometimes called, Ponce-passu, the old name of Wild Cat creek, on the head waters of which some of

the Delawares lived.* The other village is, properly, Buck-ong-a-he-las, before mentioned.

16. This village of Tippecanoe was on the Wabash, a few miles below the mouth of the Tippecanoe river.

17. The site of the present Shawneetown, on the Ohio, in Illinois.

18. In Massac county, Illinois.

19. This trader traded in 1804 with the Kickapoos on the Vermillion, and at Fort Harrison after the war. It is suggested that the name of this trading place thus given is a mistake, and should read Renard, a Kickapoo village, so called after their Chief, [Note 4.]

20. Nothing known of this trader. His trading place was on what is now called Little river, a head stream of the Wabash.

21. In the present State of Michigan.

22. Also in Michigan.

23. Kankakee.

24. In Michigan.

25. The St. Joseph of Lake Michigan.

WILD ANIMALS OF INDIANA.

Apropos to Mr. Lasselle's article on the old fur traders, the editor recalls a small account book and a number of other papers that came to his notice some time since. These records, dated 1859, were left by A. B. Cole, of Noblesville, an agent who purchased of local trappers and transferred his peltries to the Ewing fur company, of Fort Wayne. What animals contributed to this branch of commerce, together with their comparative numbers and values, is shown by these old leaflets, of which the following is a sample:

Invoice of furs and peltries sold Ewing, Walker & Co., by Conner, Stevenson & Cole:

*Mr. Lasselle errs here. The Conner trading post was on White river, four miles below the present site of Noblesville.—*Editor*.